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## October 13, 1775: A Reason for Navy Medicine to Celebrate

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*By André B. Sobociński, historian, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery*



“Storming Fort Fisher, January 1865.” Navy Medicine’s history is full of countless stories of Navy Medicine’s finest like Assistant Surgeon William Longshaw sacrificing themselves in act the of saving lives. Navy Art Collection.

On October 13, 1775 the Continental Navy was born. Aboard the first ships of the tiny Continental fleet were the seeds of today’s Navy Medicine—the sickbays and cockpits where ship surgeons, surgeon’s mates practiced their healing craft with the aid of loblolly boys.

Over the last 240 years nautical medicine has matured into its own—from a loose confederation of medical personnel to the “thriving, global health care system fully engaged in providing high quality health care to beneficiaries in wartime and in peacetime” today.



Aboard the first ships of the Continental Navy like the Andrea Doria, were sickbay where ship surgeons like Drs. Joseph Harrison and Henry Tillinghast practiced their healing craft. Oil Painting by William Van Powell. Navy Art Collection

The journey of Navy Medicine over the course of our history has been one of defining who we are while establishing the very discipline of military medicine. Among our early standard-bearers were men like Dr. Edward Cutbush who penned the first textbook on U.S. military medicine, *Observations on the Means of Preserving the Health of Sailors and Soldiers* (1808).

The early years of Navy Medicine saw the establishment of the first permanent Navy hospitals (Portsmouth, Va., 1830), adoption of better physical standards in recruiting, development of the hospital ships (USS *Red Rover*, 1863) and the founding of a central medical headquarters to oversee the Navy Medical Department (BUMED, 1842).

From the Revolutionary War through World War II to the Global Contingency Operations, Navy medical personnel like William Mann, Eugene Herring, Almon Wilson and others would help define the field of amphibious medicine as well as the concepts of fleet hospitals, medical evacuation and frontline care. At the field hospitals in the Battle of Bladensburg (1814) to the mobile hospitals of the Pacific War to the trauma surgical units in Afghanistan, Navy Medicine has helped make medical care more accessible while ushering in battlefield advances like damage control surgery and blood transfusions.

Navy Medicine has not been short on heroics. Along with our 28 Medals of Honor and 237 Navy Crosses are countless stories of Navy Medicine's finest like William Longshaw, Weedon Osborne, Marie Hidell, Matthew Bourgeois and many more making the ultimate sacrifice while saving the lives of others.

Throughout its history Navy Medicine has continually stood on the vanguard of innovation—from developing better means of producing ether (1850s) to exploring new methods for treating tetanus, cholera, frostbite, immersion foot, tuberculosis and tropical diseases. Navy Medicine can be credited for developing the acrylic eye; establishing the world's first tissue and bone bank; inventing the wire-basket

stretcher, the field of atomic medicine, the first anti-blackout devices and aviation pressure suits; and pioneering saturation diving, and decompression schedules. The list of our achievements in innovation goes on and on.



Navy dentist participating in Civic Action Program in Vietnam, circa 1966.

BUMED Archives



ENS Kathryn Pribram, Navy Flight nurse returning from Iwo Jima.

BUMED Archives



Fleet Hospital 103 in Iraq. Oil Painting by Morgan Wilbur. Navy Art Collection



Hospital Corpsmen attending to a wounded Marine at Belleau Wood, June 1918. BUMED Archives

From the Arica earthquake of 1868 to civic action programs in Vietnam to massive relief efforts in Indonesia (2004) and Haiti (2010), Navy Medicine has a long and proud history in disaster response and humanitarian missions. This important legacy and commitment to partner nations continues through recent efforts, Continuing Promise and Pacific Partnership in 2015.

If birthdays are reason to reflect on one's own history then let us take a moment on October 13<sup>th</sup> to reflect back on our proud past. And let us take pride in the tradition we continue to build.

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